

SLAFTER (E.F.)

Fitch Edward Oliver, M.D.











*John Howard Hume*

# MEMOIR

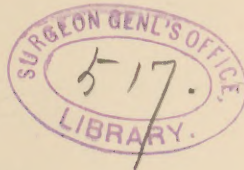
OF

FITCH EDWARD OLIVER, M.D,

BY

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MEMBER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY.



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## MEMOIR.

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FITCH EDWARD OLIVER was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the 25th day of November, 1819, and died in Boston on the 8th day of December, 1892. He was descended from a distinguished line of ancestors, who have been prominent in the annals of Massachusetts from the beginning. Thomas Oliver, the emigrant ancestor, came in the "William and Francis" from London, and settled in Boston in 1632. He was educated as a physician, and practised that profession in Boston. He also held the important office of ruling elder in the church. His son Peter and grandson Daniel were prominent merchants; and the latter was a member of the Governor's Council, and eminent for his "piety, humility, and charity." Andrew, of the fourth generation, and Andrew, Jr., of the fifth, Thomas Fitch, of the sixth, and Daniel, of the seventh, were all graduates of Harvard College, and were distinguished for the high official positions which they occupied, or for their scholarship and learning.

Dr. Daniel Oliver, the father of the subject of this sketch, was a man of ripe scholarship and wide learning. He was a Professor of Intellectual Philosophy in Dartmouth College for many years, and Lecturer on Chemistry and Materia Medica in the medical school connected with the College, and likewise in several other medical institutions. Two thirds of the work of translating the definitions of Schrevelius's Greek Lexicon, in Dr. John Pickering's first edition of that work, published in 1829, were done by Dr. Daniel Oliver. He left three sons:



Peter Oliver, the author of the "Puritan Commonwealth"; the Rev. Andrew Oliver, D.D., Professor of Biblical Learning in the General Theological Seminary, New York; and the subject of this sketch.

Fitch Edward Oliver received his early education at several institutions; partly at the Franklin Academy, at North Andover, at the Moor's School at Hanover, New Hampshire, and at Kimball Union Academy at Meriden, in the same State. In the autumn of 1835, then under sixteen years of age, he entered Dartmouth College.

At that period it was customary in our New England colleges to give the undergraduates in winter a long vacation, of about eight weeks; and a great majority of them devoted this leisure to giving instruction in small schools in the rural districts. This custom was useful and salutary to the young men themselves. Besides the pecuniary advantage, the self-government and control, the dignity of bearing and propriety of conduct, which it was necessary to maintain at all times, the review of the fundamental and practical branches of education, which most of them needed, made these weeks not less improving than any other similar period of time in their whole college life. In his Sophomore year young Oliver, then seventeen years of age, was appointed master of a small school in Boxford, Massachusetts, of which he says, in a note left among his papers, "I have reason to believe that my humble efforts to improve the rustic mind were not entirely fruitless."

After his graduation, in 1839, the question of his future occupation or career presented itself for his decision. At that time most college men expected to enter one of the three learned professions, divinity, law, or medicine. By many the question was decided while they were in the early stages of their education. But young Oliver had given to the subject little thought; in fact, he had no strong predilection for either. After a too hasty decision, he entered the office of the Hon. Ira Perley, of Concord, New Hampshire, subse-



quently Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of that State, as a student of law. The experience of two months in office work and study made it clearly apparent to him that he had not the taste, and probably not the talent, for the legal profession. He accordingly abandoned his hastily formed purpose, and, under the direction and tuition of his father, entered upon the study of medicine. During the winter of 1839-40 he attended a course of lectures at the Harvard Medical School. In the autumn of 1840 he likewise attended a course of lectures at the Medical School at Dartmouth College. Late in the same autumn he accompanied his father, who was at that time a lecturer at the Medical College of Ohio, to Cincinnati, where he attended another course of lectures. In March, 1841, he returned to Boston, and became a student of medicine under the direction of Dr. John S. Butler, the medical superintendent of the city institutions at South Boston, where he found ample opportunity for clinical observation and the study of disease. Remaining in Boston, he took a private course of instruction for a year or more under the tuition of Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes. He continued his studies in connection with the Harvard Medical School till the spring of 1843. With these ample sources of instruction, to which he devoted himself with unremitting assiduity, after the usual examinations, he received his medical degree from Harvard College, and was gratified to be told that he stood among the first of those who graduated that year. He was immediately elected a Fellow of the Massachusetts Medical Society, and continued in membership till his death.

Before entering upon the practical duties of his profession, he passed somewhat more than a year in Europe, giving several months to the study of the Italian language, and to certain branches of medical science for which he found better opportunities in Paris than had been offered at home. The remaining part of the year he devoted to travel. He visited the most interesting parts of France and Italy, and made him-

self familiar, to some extent, with the most celebrated works of art, in painting, sculpture, and architecture. He was a month among the mountains of Switzerland, spending some time at all the distinguished points of observation, gathering impressions of natural scenery which were as lasting as they were elevating and inspiring, whose memories were clear and vivid and a source of pleasure to the end of his life.

On returning to America in the autumn of 1844, he opened an office in Boston for the practice of medicine, where he continued in practice, more or less actively, for forty-eight years. Soon after he began practice he was appointed one of the Boston Dispensary physicians. This corporation was established in the later years of the last century. It is wholly an eleemosynary institution, and has no connection with the city government. Its expenses are paid by charitable contributions. Physicians are appointed by the corporation, who are in daily attendance at given hours, to prescribe for the poor who are invited to come, and medicines are given them free of expense. The services of the physicians are rendered gratuitously. To this most important and useful charity, Dr. Oliver gave his time and thought, with prompt and cheerful punctuality, for the period of three years.

In 1848 Dr. Oliver, in connection with his friend Dr. William W. Morland, translated from the French the erudite treatise entitled "The Elements of General Pathology," by Dr. A. F. Chomel. This work is an octavo volume of 458 pages, and is a careful, learned, and scientific treatment of the subject. The translation, the chief part of which was done by Dr. Oliver, is in clear, succinct, idiomatic English, and was justly considered a valuable contribution to the literature of the medical profession.

The next year, perhaps in recognition of his service in the before-named translation, he was elected a corresponding member of the Glasgow Medico-Chirurgical Society in Scotland, and likewise the same year he was admitted to member-

ship in the Boston Medical Improvement Society, in which he took an active interest. He was its recording secretary from 1856 to 1860, during which period he prepared for the press extracts from its proceedings, containing valuable observations on the treatment of particular diseases by eminent surgeons and physicians of New England, making one of the eight octavo volumes of its publications.

In 1860 he was appointed editor of the "Boston Medical and Surgical Journal," in connection with Dr. Calvin Ellis. He resigned this office in 1864, having issued three volumes of this valuable and highly scientific magazine.

On the opening of the Boston City Hospital, in 1864, he was appointed one of the visiting physicians, which office he continued to discharge until his resignation, in 1872, when he was appointed a consulting physician of this institution.

For many years he was physician to the House of the Good Samaritan, a private hospital established and conducted by Miss Anne S. Robbins; and on his resignation he continued his connection with the institution by becoming one of its consulting physicians. At the time of his death he was likewise the senior consulting physician to St. Luke's Convalescent Home.

For ten years, from 1860 to 1870, he was an instructor in *Materia Medica* in the Harvard Medical School. In 1859 he was elected to the professorship of *Materia Medica* in the Berkshire Medical School; but some inconvenience as to the time of giving his lectures induced him to decline the appointment.

In 1872 Dr. Oliver contributed to the State Board of Health an elaborate, able, and scientific paper on the use and abuse of opium, which was printed in the annual report of the Board for that year. The opinions which he obtained from members of the medical profession, and the facts which he gathered as to the abuse in the use of this narcotic present an important and surprising chapter in the history of hygiene in Massachusetts.



Three years later, in 1875, he contributed a similar paper to the same Board, on the "Health of Boston," which was printed in their seventh report. In it he pointed out the diseases on which the variations of the death-rate largely depend, the localities in the city where they had chiefly prevailed, and the causes to which they could be satisfactorily traced. We have not the space here to give an analysis of this able and scientific treatment of a difficult and abstruse subject. Its publication is accompanied by a note which states that it is "commended by the Board to that careful consideration which the reputation of the writer and its thorough research deserve."

As a physician, in the practice of medicine, Dr. Oliver brought to his duties fresh and abundant learning, conscientiousness, unsparing devotion, and the most scrupulous care. He was rewarded by the confidence, gratitude, and love of his patients.

But Dr. Oliver was deeply interested in many subjects lying beyond the limits of his profession. Especially was this true of Massachusetts history, in which his family, in direct as well as in collateral lines, had borne an important and conspicuous part.

Chief Justice Benjamin Lynde, and his son Benjamin Lynde, Jr., who succeeded his father as Chief Justice in the Province of Massachusetts Bay, left each of them a manuscript diary of current events, which give an admirable picture of the social life of that period. The earliest record of the senior Lynde begins in 1690, and the last record of the junior ends in 1780. They thus cover, more or less completely, a period of ninety years. These distinguished magistrates were ancestors of Dr. Oliver. Inspired by a filial loyalty, he bestowed a great amount of time and care in preparing, by annotation and otherwise, these manuscripts for the press; and they were privately printed in one volume in 1880, just a hundred years after the last entry was made by the younger Lynde, and the



year immediately preceding his death. Dr. Oliver has pre-faced the volume with brief but carefully prepared memoirs of the two judges, with much information relating to the Lynde family; while the diaries are illustrated with learned notes, the result of painstaking and unwearied research.

The Hon. Thomas Hutchinson, who had been Chief Justice, and was Governor of the Province of Massachusetts Bay at the breaking out of the Revolution, after his retirement to England as a loyalist, kept a careful journal of events, noting his interviews and conversations with George III., with the members of his cabinet, and persons of influence and distinction, revealing incidentally the motives and springs of action that controlled his official conduct while a citizen of Boston. This diary had remained in manuscript somewhat over a hundred years, and was written not for publication, but for personal reference and for the satisfaction and information of his immediate family.

From a long and careful study of the spirit and motives which controlled the conduct of the great body of the loyalists, it was Dr. Oliver's opinion that much injustice had been done them, and that this was especially true of Governor Hutchinson, "whom," in Dr. Oliver's own words, "American historians have taken pleasure in misrepresenting because of his loyalty to the government he had sworn to defend and serve." He was confident that the publication of the diary would not only throw fresh light upon a most interesting period of Massachusetts history, but remove from Governor Hutchinson the stigma which had been so unjustly placed upon him by some of our leading historians. The manuscript was in the possession of Mr. Peter O. Hutchinson, of Sidmouth, England, a descendant of the author, with whom Dr. Oliver had for a long time been in intimate correspondence. At length by his urgency it was published, with other related documents, in 1884. It proves to be, what Dr. Oliver anticipated, an important contribution to our Revolutionary history. It makes it plain to

the fair-minded, unprejudiced, conscientious student, that in that, as in most critical periods, there are really two sides to be considered ; that the vices are not all on one side, and the virtues all on the other.

“ He finds with keen discriminating sight,  
Black 's not so black, nor white so very white.”

The Rev. William Hubbard, of Ipswich, who died in 1704, wrote what he entitled a “ General History of New England,” covering the period from the year 1620 to the year 1680. The original of the work disappeared at an early period. A copy was made, which still exists, and is in the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society. From this a copy was made by Chief Justice Oliver, who was an antiquary as well as a learned judge ; and when as a loyalist he left Massachusetts in 1776, he took it with him to England, and it is now in the possession of one of his descendants. It is a somewhat singular fact, that this valuable history remained in manuscript until 1815, when the Massachusetts Historical Society printed it in their Collections. Their copy, still in their possession, as before stated, was found to be defective. The copy made by Chief Justice Oliver was complete, and the Committee of Publication made application to the family in England for a copy of such part of the manuscript as would enable them to make the printed edition complete. But the representative of the Oliver family in England, who was then in possession of the manuscript, was not in a mood to grant the request. The beginning and the end of the Society's manuscript were gone, and no one could know how much other parts of the work were modified by the lacking fragments ; nevertheless, like the headless and armless statues which we sometimes see in galleries of art, it had a value, which demanded its preservation. Hubbard's History was therefore printed, in 1815, with the great deficiencies above described. All students of Massachusetts history felt deeply the loss occasioned by these defects

in the most important and valuable history of early New England, and especially as the means of making it complete were still in existence. Dr. Oliver shared this common feeling of regret, and was probably the only gentleman in Massachusetts who could hope to exercise any personal influence with the owner of the manuscript in England. After the lapse of more than half a century, after the unsuccessful attempt at completing the work, the manuscript had fortunately passed into the hands of the generous-minded Mr. Peter O. Hutchinson, a great-grandson of both Chief Justice Peter Oliver and of Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Dr. Oliver, who had long been on intimate terms with Mr. Hutchinson, made a courteous request for the missing parts of the manuscript, which was granted cordially and without hesitation.

At the January meeting of the Society in 1878, Dr. Oliver communicated the copy necessary for supplying the deficiencies in the first printed edition, making in all nearly thirty pages of new matter, including a valuable preface by Hubbard of nearly nine pages, in the second and completed edition, which was issued the same year. Dr. Oliver often spoke with pride and satisfaction of his agency in completing this history.

On the death of the Rev. Dr. Nicholas Hoppin, for many years Rector of Christ Church, Cambridge, Dr. Oliver, by appointment, wrote a very appreciative memoir, which was published in the Proceedings of the Historical Society for the year 1887.

In 1890 Dr. Oliver edited and carried through the press a diary left by William Pynchon, a lawyer of distinction in Salem, Massachusetts. The journal extends through somewhat more than thirteen years, with however several breaks, beginning in January, 1776, and ending on the 2d of March, 1789. It covers the Revolutionary period and the early formative years of our general government. It does not discuss political principles, but it casts, at times, suggestive doubts upon the new and untried measures of the reforming party.

Mr. Pynchon was a loyalist, and was generally unmolested; but at one time the windows of his house were broken by a "patriotic mob."

The diary is chiefly important as giving incidentally a vivid picture of social life in Salem, and information relating to many prominent families in other parts of the country. Dr. Oliver has added a brief but interesting memoir of Mr. Pynchon, and enriched the whole volume with valuable notes of local and family history. His annotations are models of their kind, clear, concise, and in pure, faultless English.

Besides the publications already mentioned, Dr. Oliver left a large number of papers in manuscript, carefully prepared, and ready for the press. Among them are memoirs of fourteen distinguished persons bearing the name of Oliver, either in the line of his ancestors or in collateral branches of his family. Should these memoirs ever be published, as it is most desirable that they should be, they would constitute a rich contribution to that class of our historical literature to which they belong. He had likewise undertaken a history of the Church of the Advent, Boston, and had carried the work forward, covering somewhat more than a third of the period from its beginning to the present time.

Dr. Oliver was a devout lover, indeed a highly gifted connoisseur, of church music. In this science, to unusual natural gifts he added an exact knowledge and a refined and cultivated taste. He often indulged in original composition, but was too modest or too distrustful of himself to offer anything of his own for publication. In 1852 he published a small work, in which he adapted a selection of Gregorian melodies to the canticles in the Book of Common Prayer, the "Venite, exultemus Domino," "Te Deum laudamus," "Benedicite omnia opera Domini," "Jubilate Deo," "Cantate Domino," and all the rest both in the morning and evening service. To these he added several others, and among them the "De Profundis," his arrangement for which has come to be



regarded as a classic. The quality of this publication, as well as the want it supplied, is indicated by the fact that it has already passed through seven editions.

Four years later, in 1856, in association with the Rt. Rev. Bishop Southgate, then Rector of the Church of the Advent in Boston, he edited the Psalter with appropriate chants, which was the first time the Psalter accompanied with music had ever been published in this country.

In 1876 Dr. Oliver was elected a Resident Member of the Massachusetts Historical Society, and four years later was appointed its Cabinet-keeper. This office placed in his charge the Society's portraits and other paintings in oil, its engravings and photographs, its medals and coins, and its *curios*, the accumulations of many years, the bulk of them significant illustrations of the history of Massachusetts, covering the whole period of its colonial, provincial, and State existence. The portraits and other paintings were systematically arranged on the walls of the gallery, with a convenient method of identification; the coins, medals, *curios*, and objects of *virtu* were disposed in cases under glass, newly constructed for the purpose, where they can be easily seen, and where they may serve the educational purposes for which they were placed in the custody of the Historical Society. A file catalogue was also prepared and printed, in which the paintings, engravings, busts, and *curios* are classified and described under their appropriate heads, with references indicating the source from which they came to the Society. All this, done under the direction of Dr. Oliver, is of permanent value, and occupied much time and thought. Considerable progress was also made towards a catalogue of the Society's medals and coins, but this undertaking was left incomplete.

Dr. Oliver was an ardent lover of his kindred, and knew them well far back in the past generations. He studied their characters with a generous and tender sympathy, and, with his conservative temperament, could hardly fail to imbibe in some

degree the principles and sentiments of those, especially, who lived in the later provincial period. He made his home redolent of their memories. Its walls were adorned with large numbers of their portraits, the work of Sir Godfrey Kneller, Smibert, Blackburn, Copley, and of later artists. With them he lived both in the present and in the past. They were constant and prolific ministers of æsthetic pleasure and domestic enjoyment. By them his loyalty to their memories was daily strengthened, and his love and admiration were daily renewed.

He made a valuable collection of Oliverana. It comprises the publications of those bearing the name, discourses, lectures, funeral sermons of which they were the subjects, engravings, pen and ink sketches, and memoirs in manuscript and in print. This rare and precious collection, and its association with the loving thought and care that brought it together, will render it of priceless value both to the family and to others in all future time.

With Dr. Oliver his religion was of vital interest, and entered deeply into his heart and life. It occupied and absorbed his best thoughts, and directed his will, his purposes, and his aspirations. He identified himself with its institutions on his first entrance upon his profession in Boston. He valued the means which could unfold, enrich, and perfect the religious character. To promote this for himself and for others, he was, to the last, ready to sacrifice all considerations of ease and personal comfort. In 1847 he was elected a member of the Corporation of the Church of the Advent in Boston, a new parish established three years previously, as a free church, under the rectorship of the Rev. Dr. William Croswell. He continued a member of this corporation to the end of his life, a period of forty-five years. He was its Junior Warden for some years, and its Senior Warden at the time of his death. He was deeply interested in the establishment of this parish, on a principle which he heartily approved, and was thoroughly identified with its inception, its growth, and its work, and

for the most part was in sympathy and accord with the various distinguished rectors who have directed its affairs. He was fond of ritual, and believed the symbolism of Christian art to be an aid to devotion, and a useful teacher of religious truth. He loved his church dearly, and strove to render it as dear to others as it was to himself.

At the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, held in New York in 1889, he was appointed on a Commission for the revision of the Hymnal of the Church. A commission had been appointed some years before, and had presented its final report; but it was thought best to continue the work of revision, and a new commission was appointed, of which Dr. Oliver was a member. The work of the Commission was divided into sections. Dr. Oliver was placed on a committee on "Versions and Emendations," with the Rev. Dr. John S. B. Hodges and Dr. Henry Coppée, with Bishop Paddock of Massachusetts as chairman. The illness of Bishop Paddock and his death, which occurred a year and a half before the report was to be made at the next Convention, placed a large part of the responsibility and the work upon Dr. Oliver. He entered upon the duty with great zeal and energy. He prepared an elaborate, careful, and discriminating report, in which his learning in church music and hymnology came into use, indicating at the same time that he had given to the subject an almost unlimited amount of time and patient thought. He was also appointed a sub-committee to obtain from living authors their consent to make changes in their hymns, and from authors and publishers authority to print them in the Church Hymnal. This required a voluminous correspondence, both at home and abroad, which was laborious and sometimes difficult and perplexing, but was conducted with a dignity and courtesy which in all cases secured success.

In his later years Dr. Oliver had retired mostly from the practice of medicine, but in no degree from intellectual and



literary work. From the brief outline which we have given of his career, it is obvious that he was never an idle man. With the instincts and habits of a scholar, he investigated widely, systematically, and thoroughly. When he entered upon a theme of study, he was not content till he had patiently surveyed the whole field, and gathered in all that was necessary to know. In architecture he might properly be called a connoisseur; he studied it with great delight, and sometimes said of himself that he ought to have been an architect. To the subject of the new version of the Bible recently brought out by the great convention of scholars in England, he gave much careful study, and arrived at conclusions not favorable to its complete excellence, but nevertheless to himself clear and satisfactory. On all subjects which he had carefully considered, he was firm in his convictions, forming his opinions slowly and changing them rarely.

In social life Dr. Oliver was somewhat reticent, but modest, courteous, and dignified, and always an interesting and agreeable companion.

He received the honorary degree of Master of Arts from Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut, in 1860.

He married, on the 17th of July, 1866, Susan Lawrence Mason, eldest daughter of the Rev. Charles Mason, D.D., and granddaughter of both the celebrated jurist, the Hon Jeremiah Mason, and of Amos Lawrence, a distinguished merchant of Boston. Mrs. Oliver and six children survive him, four sons and two daughters. The eldest son, Charles Edward, is an architect in Boston; the second son, Andrew, a graduate of Harvard College in the Class of 1891, is an instructor in the classical department at Selwyn Hall, Reading, Pennsylvania.





